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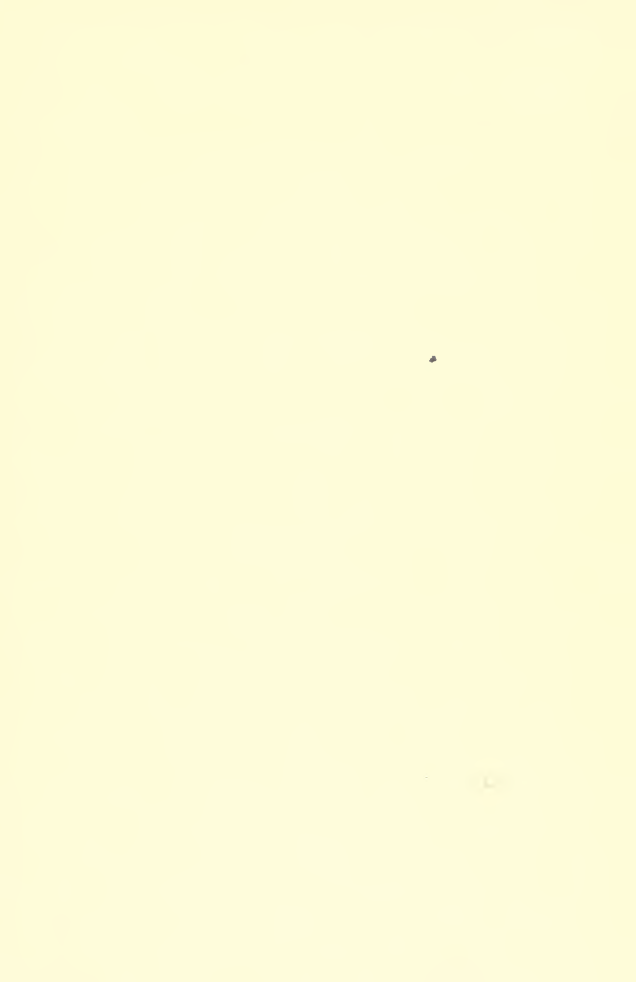


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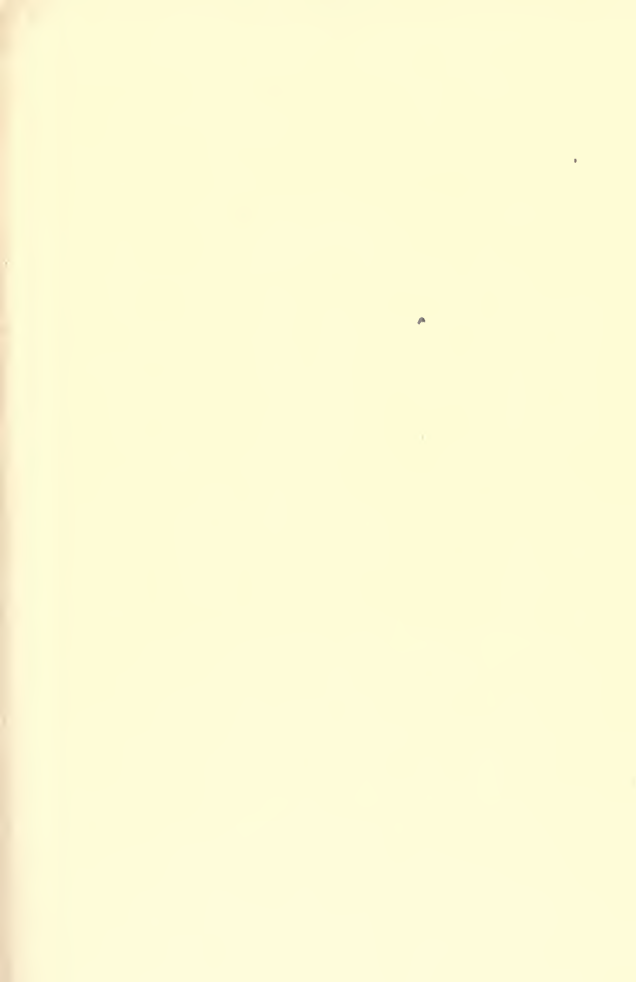
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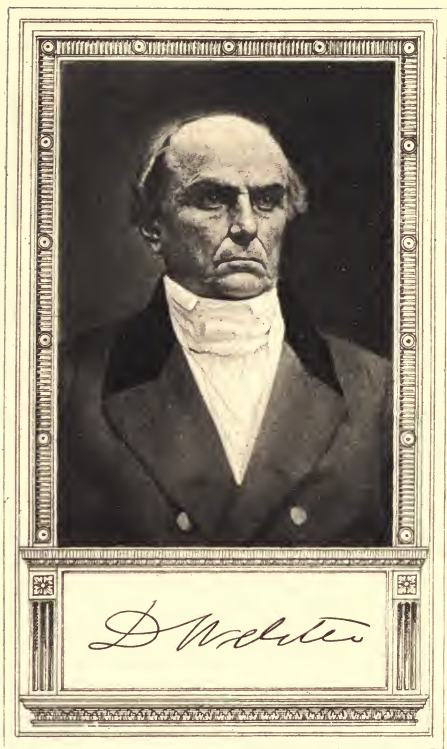
DANIEL WEBSTER

BY

NORMAN HAPGOOD







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The Summit of Beacon Hill, 1808.

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NORMAN HAPGOOD



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PREFACE.

A very short biography, which aims to sketch the most important features of Daniel Webster's story for the general reader, presumably aims particularly at presenting two aspects of his mind and character, one of which shows why he is so large a figure in a vital period of American history, while the other explains what kept him from being the greatest name on the records of the New World. The sources of information about his genius are sufficient and exact. That story lies written in his works and in the history of his country. On the other hand, he has been unfortunate in those of his biographers who might have left a speaking image of the man. Mr. Curtis, the author of the official life, has loyally blurred the portrait. Peter Harvey, in his little book of intimate impressions, shows his own mind too small to reflect, without distortion, the features of his great friend. Mr. Lanman, who has left some facts, was hardly an observer. Of course, the admirers of

every genius sigh over the absence of a Boswell; but probably few need one more than Webster. The best short life of him, that written by Senator Lodge, makes a judicious use of the materials available. The solidest critical estimate is that of James Parton. The most famous attacks are those of Theodore Parker and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

In this brief narrative the attempt is to name without elaboration the more difficult and abstract accomplishments of Webster, in the realms of law, finance, and diplomacy, and to give more fully the simpler and more popular feats, which happen in this case to be the greatest and the most profoundly influential. In treating his personal life and private traits, the desire has been to select what is reasonably beyond dispute, and what at the same time is distinctly causal in its relation to his public history.

NORMAN HAPGOOD.

NEW YORK, April 3, 1899.

CHRONOLOGY.

1782

January 18. Daniel Webster was born at Salisbury, N.H.

1794

Spring. Entered Exeter Academy.

1797

August. Entered Dartmouth College.

1800

July 4. Delivered to the citizens of Hanover his first public oration.

1801

August. Received his degree.

Winter. Was made schoolmaster at Fryeburg, Me.

1804

July 20. Went to Boston, and entered the law office of Christopher Gore.

1805

March. Admitted to the Boston bar.

1806

April. His father died. Daniel assumed his debts. Lived in Boscawen, N.H.

1807

Autumn. Transferred his law business to his brother Ezekiel, and removed to Portsmouth, N.H.

1808

June 24. Married Miss Grace Fletcher, of Salisbury. Published a speech against the Embargo of 1807.

1812

July 4. Addressed the Washington Benevolent Society at Portsmouth.

August. Sent as a delegate to the Rockingham County Assembly, and wrote the "Rockingham Memorial."

Fall. Elected to the Thirteenth Congress.

1813

May. Took his seat, and was placed on the Committee on Foreign Relations.

1813-14

Winter. Admitted to the bar of the Supreme Court.

1814

January 14. Made a speech against an enlistment bill.

CHRONOLOGY

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1814 (*continued*)

September. Returned to Washington for the extra session called.

1816

June. Removed to Boston from Portsmouth.

December. Called back to Boston from Washington by illness of his daughter Grace, who died.

1817

March 4. The Fourteenth Congress was ended, and Webster temporarily retired from public life.

September. First argument in the Dartmouth College case in New Hampshire.

1818

March 10. Final argument in the same case before the Supreme Court at Washington.

1820

Summer & Fall. Assisted in revising the Constitution of Massachusetts.

December 22. Delivered the Plymouth oration.

1822

Nominated to Congress from Boston district.

1823

December. Took his seat in Washington.

1824

January 19. Delivered a speech in favor of appointing commissioner to Greece.

March. Delivered a speech against the Tariff of 1824.

December 18. His youngest son Charles died.

1824-25

Winter. Delivered speech on national Cumberland road.

1825

June 17. Delivered the first Bunker Hill oration.

1826

August 2. Eulogy on Adams and Jefferson.

1827

June. Accepted United States senatorship from Massachusetts.

1828

January 21. Mrs. Webster died.

April. Delivered a speech for the benefit of surviving officers of the Revolution.

May. Delivered famous speech on the Tariff of 1828, and voted for the "Bill of Abominations."

November 12. Delivered an oration in Boston on "Science in Connection with the Mechanic Arts."

1829

December 12. Married Miss Caroline Le Roy, of New York.

1830

January 20. First answer to Hayne.

January 26. The second and famous "Reply to Hayne."

1833

February 8. Supported the "Force Bill" in a noted speech.

February 16. Replied to Calhoun's nullification argument with the able speech known as "The Constitution not a Compact between Sovereign States."

1833 (*continued*)*Summer.* Made a tour through the West.

1836

Unsuccessful candidate for President, Massachusetts alone supporting him.

1837

March 15. Made a famous speech at Niblo's Garden.*Summer.* Made a second tour of the West.

1839

January. Re-elected to the Senate.*Summer.* Went to England as a private citizen.*December.* Returned to America.

1841

February 22. Resigned his seat in the Senate.*March 4.* Accepted Secretaryship of State.

1841-42

Winter. "Ashburton Treaty."

1843

May. Resigned his Secretaryship, and went to Marshfield for the summer.

1843

June 17. Second Bunker Hill oration.

1844-45

Winter. Again elected Senator from Massachusetts upon the resignation of Choate.

1846

February. Attacked by C. J. Ingersoll, of Philadelphia.

April 6, 7. Speech on "Ashburton Treaty."

1847

Summer. Made a tour of Southern States.

1848

April 28. His daughter, Mrs. Appleton, died in Boston.

May 3. Burial of his second son, Major Edward Webster, brought back from Mexico.

September 1. Speech at Marshfield on the nomination of General Taylor.

1850

March 7. Delivered the great "7th of March" speech.

1850 (*continued*)

July 23. Accepted again the Secretaryship of State, and resigned his seat in the Senate.

December 21. Rebuked Austria through the "Hulseman Letter."

1852

May. Thrown from his carriage near Marshfield, and seriously hurt.

Summer. Again an unsuccessful candidate for the Presidency.

July. Came to Boston.

August. Returned to Washington.

September 8. Returned to Marshfield.

October 24. Daniel Webster died.

October 29. Plain but public funeral.

DANIEL WEBSTER

DANIEL WEBSTER.

I.

A BIOGRAPHY of the greatest American orator is mainly the story of his developing genius and his unfolding character. His life contained few accidents. Up to the age of fifty we merely watch the expansion of his powers, the mastery of law and politics, the victory over the ordinary obstacles of a progress from obscurity to fame, from a border farm to the tribunal on which he stood as the strongest defender of the Constitution and its liberties. Then, after the summit has been reached, we trace the barely perceptible decline, equally caused from within, on this descent, certain traits in the character gaining the ascendancy over the healthy genius. The story is as significant as a high imaginative drama, because it is a single and tremendous progress, the flowering and partial fading of a powerful soul,—

a rising in force like the tide, and then the gradual ebb until death. With its touch of sadness, it is nevertheless an inspiring and uplifting story, because the brilliant powers and priceless results stand out eternal, even where they were dimmed in the short space of a life. Probably no other modern orator has left so many words that live; and, on the other hand, no other modern orator has moved more deeply listening bodies of men. His words last from their solid thought and chaste eloquence, even now that their work is accomplished. He lives not, like so many great orators, as a mere name, but in some of the most popular passages in his country's literature. When the lines of the conflict were drawing, this majestic speaker pierced the issues to the heart, and gave to the truth the encouragement of moving explanation. The principles of union came to the reflective country lad from Hamilton, Adams, and Washing-

ton; they developed in the lawyer and statesman under the guidance of the great jurists, Marshall and Story; but Webster alone could send them through the battle in words that blazed with truth and courage alike for the leaders and the people. The orator educated, warmed, and invigorated the nation; and the phrases of his speeches formed the rock on which his country stood in the hour of trial. If before the end his own heart grew faint, after his death a young nation fighting for truths new in the world was still sheltered by his words,—“liberty and union, now and forever, one and inseparable.”

The story of this life begins among the early New England hardships, in which the country first matured its strength. The Websters, of Scotch extraction, had been in America since about 1636; and Ebenezer, Daniel's father, had fought his way through the French Wars, and built, near the banks of the Merrimack in

the town of Salisbury, New Hampshire, the first log cabin in the vicinity. When the war for independence broke out, Captain Webster left his farm and mill, rallied his neighbors, and fought with Washington to the end,—a strong man, trusted, fearless, tall and lithe, dark as an Indian, knowing little of books, but reading the best he could find by the light of the fire in his log cabin on winter nights. His second wife, Abigail Eastman, the mother of Daniel and his only whole brother, Ezekiel, was of Welsh extraction, and a thorough daughter of New England, one of a race as sturdy as her husband's. Of the nine other sons and daughters of the two marriages, Ezekiel alone counted for much in the life of Daniel.

When his youngest and most gifted son was born on Jan. 18, 1782, Ebenezer had left his cabin for a house. His mountain farm in New Hampshire stood within sight of the lofty peaks of Kear-

sarge and Washington, and one field contained a hundred acres of level meadow. Always increasing in the respect of his neighbors, he became in turn legislator and judge. His convictions were born of the conditions of his time. As the battle for free worship had been won, his Puritanism was broad and gentle ; and, as the battle for nationality was still raging, his Federalism, with its belief in every centralizing tendency of the newly adopted Constitution, was harsh and narrow. To him the French Revolution was all wickedness, and Thomas Jefferson an object to abhor. Once, when he believed himself dying, away from home, he insisted on being moved, saying that he "was born a Federalist and always lived a Federalist, and would not die in any but a Federalist town."

Daniel was born two years after Eze-kiel, who was called the most beautiful man of his time. His manners were dis-

tinguished, and he was vigorous, industrious, and persevering. Daniel himself was slight and delicate, and his poor health and distaste for work allowed him to loaf and reflect. His demeanor was impressive, dignified, unusual; and his costume is said to have been chosen always with a quick eye for the best effect. Although he rode to plough, curried horses, and tended the saw-mill, his instinct was to catch trout, shoot squirrels, and fight cocks. This story floats about the Salisbury neighborhood. Their father had given Zeke and Daniel directions to do a piece of work during his temporary absence; but, on his return, he found the labor unperformed, and with a frown questioned the boys. "What have you been doing, Ezekiel?" "Nothing, sir." "Well, Daniel, what have you been doing?" "Helping Zeke, sir."

At a log school-house half a mile from the Webster farm, and then at another,

over two miles away, Daniel picked up a slight amount of information. Master Tappan, the boy's teacher, was quoted thus in a Boston newspaper at about the time of Webster's death: "Daniel was always the brightest boy in the school, and Ezekiel the next; but Daniel was much quicker at his studies than his brother. He would learn more in five minutes than another boy in five hours. One Saturday, I remember, I held up a handsome new jack-knife to the scholars, and said the boy who would commit to memory the greatest number of verses in the Bible by Monday morning should have it. Many of the boys did well; but, when it came to Daniel's turn to recite, I found that he had committed so much that, after hearing him repeat some sixty or seventy verses, I was obliged to give up, he telling me that there were several chapters yet that he had learned. Daniel got that jack-knife." The boy's real education was

in his father's saw-mill, where he read and reread a few good books as the logs passed through. At Salisbury where he spent most of his boyhood, three miles from his birthplace at Elms Farm, he paid to the village storekeeper, who was also his schoolmaster, the only twenty-five cents he possessed for a handkerchief with the Constitution of the United States printed upon it. He learned history from an old British sailor in the vicinity, from men who had fought Indians and women who had heard their midnight yell. Barefoot, dressed in his mother's homespun garments, he went about the country and recited poetry as he walked, so that the neighbors sometimes stopped to listen.

His own view of the value of being born in such a time at such a place was given many years later, when he spoke of the landing of the Pilgrims: "The morning that beamed on the first night of their repose saw the Pilgrims already

at home in their country. There were political institutions and civil liberty and religious worship. Poetry has fancied nothing, in the wanderings of heroes, so distinct and characteristic. Here was man, indeed, unprotected, and unprovided for, on the shore of a rude and fearful wilderness; but it was politic, intelligent, and educated man. Everything was civilized but the physical world. Institutions, containing in substance all that ages had done for human government, were organized in a forest. Cultivated mind was to act on uncultivated nature; and, more than all, a government and a country were to commence, with the very first foundations made under the divine light of the Christian religion. Happy auspices of a happy futurity! Who would wish that his country's existence had otherwise begun? Who would desire the power of going back to the ages of fables? Who would wish for an origin

obscured in the darkness of antiquity? Who would wish for other emblazoning of his country's heraldry or other ornaments of her genealogy than to be able to say that her first existence was with intelligence, her first breath the inspiration of liberty, her first principle the truth of divine religion?"

As Daniel spent his boyhood contemplating nature, listening to anecdotes and doctrine from men and women who had lived through the nation's birth, and, doubtless, silently practising the gift of statement as the logs went through the mill, what books he had became his intimates; and he seldom walked without one. Pope's *Essay on Man* he knew entire, as he knew most of Watts's hymns and much of the Bible. *Hudibras*, the *Spectator*, Pope's *Homer*, were among the earliest books; and they were followed by Cicero, when he began to study Latin. Shakspeare and Milton, who seemed to be woven into his thought at his greatest

period, came later ; and he studied Sallust, Cæsar, Homer, and Demosthenes, when he felt that he ought to know them.

At this boyhood period he took life freely and jovially ; and, as he tells of himself, his sense of fun fed itself even on the misfortunes of others. His rollicking laugh has left its memory with numbers who knew him. He took things lightly, never strained himself, and contentedly observed what was in the air about him. The mountains and the beasts of the farm and forest spoke to him, and he never forgot their meaning. He was already germinating that feeling for big things, for health and normal happiness, for the country in which he lived, on which he later built so large an argument. Some who noticed his idle love of play believed he would come to nothing, and the wittiest of his brothers said that Daniel needed a college education to make him equal to the rest.

Others, struck by his deep-set eyes, noble carriage, rich and flexible voice, quick memory, and alert interest, prophesied that the future would know of him. He was then tall, and so thin that he weighed but one hundred and twenty pounds ; but his look already promised something of the majestic weight of later years.

Nothing could have more delighted the boy, fond of knowledge and thought, than the father's announcement that he was to go to college. Poorly prepared as he was in many ways, he had at least the habit of serious reflection and the power of quick acquisition ; and, after a few months at Phillips Exeter Academy and a little private instruction near home, he entered Dartmouth in 1797. He rapidly became known for proficiency in the things he liked, but never forced himself to disagreeable tasks. "When I was at school," he said forty years later, in an after-dinner speech,

“I felt exceedingly obliged to Homer’s messengers for the exact literal fidelity with which they delivered their messages. The seven or eight lines of good Homeric Greek in which they had received the commands of Agamemnon or Achilles they recited to whomsoever the message was to be carried ; and as they repeated them verbatim, sometimes twice or thrice, it saved me the trouble of learning so much Greek.” His attitude toward mathematics was similar ; but he read widely in history, literature, and a few Latin authors, conducted a local paper for a time to pay his board, and became known for his oratory. As, according to his own testimony, he was too shy to speak at Exeter, he must have gained confidence rapidly after mixing with many men. His maturer taste was so severe that he looked upon these college declamations without mercy, although, flamboyant as they were, they contained more fundamental thought

and more vigorous language than is usual in the Junior year. "While in college," he tells us, "I delivered two or three occasional addresses, which were published. I trust they are forgotten. They were in very bad taste. I had not then learned that all true power in writing is in the idea, not in the style."

As the first experiments of a great orator interest the world, one of the most lurid passages in his Junior Fourth of July oration has become rather widely known. "Columbia," he cried, "stoops not to tyrants. Her spirit will never cringe to France. Neither a supercilious five-headed directory nor the gasconading pilgrim of Egypt will ever dictate terms to sovereign America! The thunder of our cannon shall insure the performance of our treaties and fulminate destruction on Frenchmen till the ocean is crimsoned with blood and gorged with pirates." What is much more remark-

able is that the boy of eighteen could also write like this: "No sooner was peace restored with England (the first grand article of which was the acknowledgment of our independence) than the old system of Confederation, dictated at first by necessity and adopted for the purposes of the moment, was found inadequate to the government of an extensive empire. Under a full conviction of this we then saw the people of these States engaged in a transaction which is undoubtedly the greatest approximation towards human perfection the political world had ever yet witnessed, and which, perhaps, will forever stand in the history of mankind without a parallel. A great republic composed of different States, whose interest in all respects could not be perfectly compatible, then came deliberately forward, discarded one system of government and adopted another without the loss of one man's blood." In verse also, which was

commonplace enough, he suggested the woes of war, and advised his country to give thanks for peace.

At Daniel's instigation, during his Junior year his parents, already burdened with a mortgaged farm, decided to send Ezekiel also to Dartmouth, and trust the boys for future help. Daniel, royally as he expected and demanded much from others, was grateful and sympathetic; and he made part of the sacrifice required for his brother's education at college, which began in the year of Daniel's graduation with the class of 1801. After this event he entered a country law office near home, but soon left it, in fulfilment of his promise to help in Ezekiel's support, and went off to the village of Fryeburg in Maine to teach school by day and copy deeds by night. In a few months he was able to return to Salisbury and continue reading law, choosing books of general legal philosophy, like Montes-

quieu and Blackstone, or of history, like Hume and Robertson, and formulating later a doctrine that it was useless to attack such an abstract person as Coke until the path had first been made easy by some one as attractive as Espinasse. He preferred to travel by pleasant paths, but he travelled far.

His poverty did not weigh upon him. While he was teaching school and copying deeds, he wrote thus to one of his friends: "You will naturally inquire how I prosper in the article of cash. Finely! finely! I came here in January with a horse, watch, etc., and a few rascally counters in my pocket. Was soon obliged to sell my horse, and live on the proceeds. Still straightened for cash, I sold my watch and made a shift to get home, where my friends supplied me with another horse and another watch. My horse is sold again; and my watch goes, I expect, this week. Thus you see how I lay up cash." To another friend,

however, he suggests that he did deny himself some pleasures from economy. "Perhaps," he wrote, "you thought, as I did, that a dozen dollars would slide out of the pocket in a Commencement jaunt much easier than they would slide in again after you got home. That was the exact reason why I was not there. . . . I flatter myself that none of my friends ever thought me greatly absorbed in the sin of avarice ; yet I assure you, Jem, that in these days of poverty I look upon a round dollar with a great deal of complacency. These rascal dollars are so necessary to the comfort of life that, next to a fine wife, they are most essential, and their acquisition an object of prime importance. O Bingham, how blessed it would be to retire with a decent, clever bag of Rixes to a pleasant country town, and follow one's own inclination without being shackled by the duties of a profession !"

In 1804 he left his native New Hampshire town, and entered the office of Christopher Gore, a scholarly lawyer and statesman of Boston, soon to be chosen governor of Massachusetts. Under his guidance Webster read wisely and much. A glimpse into the young man's democratic feelings, which never left him, is given in this extract from a letter of that year: "Jerome, the brother of the emperor of the Gauls, is here. Every day you may see him whisking along Cornhill, with the true French air, with his wife by his side. The lads say that they intend to prevail on American misses to receive company in future after the manner of Jerome's wife; that is, in bed. The gentlemen of Boston (*i.e.*, we Feds) treat Monsieur with cold and distant respect. They feel, and every honest man feels, indignant at seeing this lordly grasshopper, this puppet in prince's clothes, dashing through the American cities, luxuriously rioting

on the property of Dutch mechanics or Swiss peasants." While he was quietly reading law and observing men, a hard problem suddenly crossed his path. To lighten the pecuniary hardships of Ebenezer Webster, who had served since 1791 as judge in a local court, his associates, near the end of 1804, offered to the old man for Daniel the office of clerk of court, with a salary large enough to raise the whole family to comfort. Daniel went to Mr. Gore, radiant with his fortune. Hard-headed Mr. Gore coldly told him he was not made to be a clerk. Daniel started home at once to break the news of his declination to his parents. His father was aghast. That his son should sacrifice the ease of all his kin to vague prospects of future greatness left him almost dumb. "Well, my son," he exclaimed, "your mother has always said that you would come to something or nothing. She was not sure which. I think you are now about settling that

doubt for her." He never mentioned the subject again.

The next year Daniel, after his admission to the Boston bar, came to Boscawen, near Salisbury; for his father's end was evidently near. When the brave old man died, Daniel, in 1807, turned over his practice to Zeke, and went to Portsmouth, a flourishing town, where his talents brought him rapidly in contact with some of the best legal minds of the country, especially with Jeremiah Mason, who used to win all his cases,—a gigantic body, with a mind so penetrating and firm that Mr. Webster said in later years that not even Marshall surpassed Mason in original power, however superior the great chief justice might be in training. Mr. Webster tells us that Mason's success with juries first taught him to drop all high-sounding phrases and talk in simple language straight at the minds before him. The trend of his own taste was already strong in that direction, but he

learned from Mason as he learned from every strong man he met.

The young man's strides upward, both in law and in oratory, were very rapid. His appearance at this stage—the look and bearing which were always his, powerful allies—is described by a number of keen witnesses: “When Mr. Webster began to speak, his voice was low, his head was sunk upon his breast, his eyes were fixed upon the floor, and he moved his feet incessantly, backward and forward, as if trying to secure a firmer position. His voice soon increased in power and volume till it filled the whole house. His attitude became erect, his eyes dilated, and his whole countenance was radiant with emotion.”

“He was a black, raven-haired fellow, with an eye as black as death, and as heavy as a lion's,—and no lion in Africa ever had a voice like him; and his look was like a lion's,—that same

heavy look, not sleepy, but as if he didn't care about anything that was going on about him or anything anywhere else. He didn't look as if he was thinking about anything, but as if he would think like a hurricane if he once got waked up to it. They say the lion looks so when he is quiet. It wasn't an empty look, this of Webster's, but one that didn't seem to see anything going on worth his while."

This last is not unlike the impression which Thomas Carlyle got of him years after : —

"Not many days ago I saw at breakfast the notablest of all your notabilities, Daniel Webster. He is a magnificent specimen. You might say to all the world, 'This is our Yankee Englishman, such limbs we make in Yankee land !' As a logic fencer, or parliamentary Hercules, one would be inclined to back him at first sight against all the extant world. The tanned complexion, that

amorphous crag-like face, the dull black eyes under the precipice of brows, like dull anthracite furnaces, needing only to be *blown*, the mastiff mouth accurately closed,—I have not traced so much of *silent Berserkir* rage that I remember in any man.” An old friend of his father’s on meeting the son once remarked: “In the war we could not tell whether Captain Webster’s face was a natural color or blackened by powder. You must be his son, for you are a cursed sight blacker than he was!” A navy in the streets of Liverpool, pointing to Mr. Webster, exclaimed, “There goes a king!” James Russell Lowell says that President Tyler in his carriage with Webster looked like a swallow against a thunder-cloud, and Sydney Smith called him a cathedral.

His look, his voice, his brain, which played easily with large subjects, absorbed rapidly, and seized the best in the minds about him, brought him a

success which soon carried him to a still larger field. His marriage in May of 1808 to Grace Fletcher was a strengthening influence in his life; for she was a woman of good mind and strong and pure character. His first interference in public matters was also in 1808, when he wrote a pamphlet, which was widely read, against the embargo of the preceding year. Four years later, after keeping away from politics in the mean time, he delivered a Fourth of July address, in which he spoke for a larger navy, in the spirit of Washington, eloquently pictured the importance of commerce, and attacked France for trying to trick us into a war with England, the result being that he was made a delegate to a convention held in August of 1812, by the people of Rockingham County, to oppose the war. On this occasion he wrote, as the report of a committee, the "Rockingham Memorial," a work with which he was pleased even at

the height of his powers, and which so clearly expressed the Federalist views in favor of peace that the author of it was sent by his party to the Thirteenth Congress. Here he took his seat in May, 1813.

II.

So soon as Webster set foot in the House of Representatives, he began to make himself felt by striking at the weakest points in the administration policy. His reputation at thirty-one was already so high, through his legal career, his occasional addresses, and his "Rockingham Memorial," that on his entrance the Speaker, Henry Clay, immediately put him on the Committee of Foreign Relations, the most important of all the committees in time of war, then having at its head John C. Calhoun. Mr. Webster's first resolution called upon the administration for information regarding the publication in the United States of Napoleon's repeal of the French decrees against American shipping. Of course, the object of this resolution was to show that those decrees had never been repealed, and that France, for its own benefit, was tricking

the United States into war with Great Britain. By this first resolution Webster showed not only his lasting faculty of letting side issues alone and striking hard at the centre, but also his strict Federalism. The Federalists were opposed to the war ; and, although the two Adamses deserted the party because they felt the strength of the national spirit, Daniel Webster stood almost as rigid a Federalist as his father. He was not extreme, however, in the measures he advocated ; for he had already too much moderation and too much breadth to approach as near the edge of dangerous opposition in war-time as other Federalists ventured. He really contented himself with attacking those government measures which might still be wisely changed. He continued his opposition to the destructive embargo, which Calhoun himself, spokesman of the administration, soon had to abandon to repeal.

In this first session Mr. Webster unfurled many of the banners which were to be his standards through the more glorious part of his career. He showed at once that on constitutional interpretation he stood for strictness in upholding the defensive features of the national government as well as for liberality in construing its powers. He believed that a tariff for protection was unconstitutional, but he also believed that the government had a free hand in internal improvements. Whatever he touched he made alive, for in his clear vision the legal framework of an argument was always covered with living truth. "I am not anxious," he said, in opposing the tariff, "to accelerate the approach of the period when the great mass of American labor shall not find its employment in the field; when the young men of the country shall be obliged to shut their eyes upon external nature, upon the heavens and the earth, and

immure themselves in close, unwholesome workshops; when they shall be obliged to shut their ears to the bleatings of their own flocks upon their own hills, and to the voice of the lark that cheers them at the plough,—that they may open them in dust and smoke and steam to the perpetual whirl of spools and spindles and the grating of rasps and saws!” He spoke for individual liberty against President Monroe’s conscription, an Enlistment Bill calling for a forced draft; and in April, 1816, he introduced a resolution which revealed a position in favor of sound finance from which he never wavered,—a resolution that all payments to the national treasury must be made in specie or its equivalent. There were then three parties on the question of a national bank: one opposed any bank; another, led by Calhoun, favored a paper-money institution; and the third, in which Webster was the strongest fig-

ure, was for a bank on a specie basis. When the paper-money institution had been defeated, Calhoun came to Webster, and with tears in his eyes begged him to allow the government a bank on his own terms ; and the sound-money contest was won.

One incident of this session shows the young orator in the full possession of that independent dignity which was so impressive a feature of his best years. That irritable little man, John Randolph, of Roanoke, provoked by one of his speeches, sent a challenge. He received in reply from his formidable looking opponent a brief note, of which the last half read : —

“It is enough that I do not feel myself bound, at all times and under any circumstances, to accept from any man who chooses to risk his own life an invitation of this sort ; although I shall be always prepared to repel in a suitable

manner the aggression of any man who may presume upon such a refusal.

“Your obedient servant,

“DANIEL WEBSTER.”

A growing law practice brought him from Portsmouth to Boston in 1816 ; and the need of money caused him to devote himself to it, and retire from public life in 1817, at the end of his second term. Then it was that within a few years he completed the imposing structure of his legal fame. Of the three departments of his reputation, oratory of course is first, and probably statesmanship is next ; but, nevertheless, few lawyers, in the history of our country, have stood so high in the profession. On his retirement from Congress to devote himself to practice, Mr. Webster's position already brought him the best cases, so that he constantly faced the foremost lawyers, from the head of the bar, William Pinkney, of Maryland, down ; but powerful

arguments in conspicuous cases now rapidly extended his fame. Among the first was a criminal mystery, in which Mr. Webster's shrewd and daring surmises into motives, his eloquent defence of those surmises, and, above all, his cross-examination, in which keen vision into the human mind, a manner to inspire awe and fright, and the tact to strike always at the weakest place were evenly combined, led a jury to believe that the prosecutor, Goodridge, had, for some unknown reason, robbed himself, wounded his own arm with a bullet, and then endeavored to cast the odium on the defendants. Goodridge, threatened with an action for malicious prosecution, fled. Twenty years later, when Webster was travelling, he asked for a drink at a tavern. The hand which held the glass shook like a leaf. Mr. Webster took it, and left without a word. The man was Goodridge. From this case, in April, 1817, to what is his greatest effort in the

criminal law, the prosecution of the murderer of Captain White thirteen years after, he made some of the strongest jury arguments on record. The White trial was the first occasion on which Mr. Webster pleaded against a man's life, and the opening pages of that argument are probably as nearly perfect a specimen of moving and simple eloquence as can be found in the records of the law. Few bits in American prose can stand comparison with this for dramatic vividness combined with the severest taste and the most convincing thought.

Mr. Webster has done much for the American school-boy, and that important creature loves to declaim these terrible sentences almost as keenly as he delights in the "Venerable Men" of the first Bunker Hill oration. But in this bit, as in Mr. Webster's other highest flights, the school-boy shares his rapture with the lawyer, the scholar,

and the man of taste. The qualities are not only striking, they are universal. From the opening words,—telling why the orator has consented for the first time in his life to plead for the death of a fellow-being, through the picture in the moonlight of the midnight murder and its hire and salary motives, through the words which tell how conscience struggles hardest to betray the victim when the deadly net of circumstance is binding itself about him, down to the final burst about suicide and confession,—this is surely a masterpiece of human speech ; and when we imagine how the orator must have stood, with his blazing eyes, and black, enormous head, giving forth his sentences in a voice that could bring tears and start terror, even had its words meant nothing,—it is not wonderful to read of the fright and complete surrender of the men who sat facing the speaker in the jury-box.

Mr. Webster understood the workings

of the average mind. At this high period of his genius, he swept like an eagle upon the realities of his case, holding up the central facts as seen from the simple human standpoint, as visibly to the plain juryman as to the Supreme Court of the land ; and his best jury speeches, therefore, have a force and beauty not surpassed by his ablest constitutional arguments. In one quality, indeed, the jury work stands higher. It is more original. He selected his law from the fullest men about him, so sorting and marshalling their thoughts as to give them victory ; but this power of statement, which gave his constitutional arguments their greatest virtue, sprung in the jury cases direct from his own vision of the facts, with no aid from more scholarly minds. He was always fair, never shirked or obscured the issues, and won the jury almost as much by his candor and justice as by his bearing, eloquence, and coherent argument.

It is because they are on more important topics that his leading Supreme Court arguments stand even higher. Mr. Webster himself believed, at least in some expressive moods, that the best of all his work was in the Dartmouth College case, 1818, and in *Gibbons v. Ogden*, 1824. The college case owes its immense importance to the fact that the point on which it finally rested settled the relations of the States to the national Constitution. No State legislature, it was contended and decided, had the constitutional right to interfere in the affairs of an institution like Dartmouth College, established by private persons for special purposes. Mr. Webster claimed no credit for the analysis of this case, but freely admitted his indebtedness to the able lawyers who prepared it, whose conclusions he merely fortified and expounded. But his arrangement and his exposition, in all probability, decided the issue, and led the Supreme Court to

lay down, against the previous conviction of the majority, one of the most far-reaching principles of our government. When Mr. Webster argued the case at Exeter, he left the New Hampshire judges in tears ; but they decided against him, and he learned much from their opinions. The most intelligent witness who has recorded what happened when the case went to the Supreme Court, was prejudiced by what he had heard of the result in New Hampshire, as he was no believer in pathos as a factor in legal argument. This observer saw Justice Story prepare pencil and paper for notes against the orator's position. He saw that justice sit through the argument without lifting his pencil. Afterward Justice Story explained that there was nothing to write, the whole train of thought being unfolded with such simplicity and sequence that no one could forget it. The court-room was full of women, as it frequently was when Mr.

Webster spoke even on questions which they could not understand. They came to hear those appeals to conscience and feeling, which every now and then relieved the technical discussion, and to listen to the voice and keep their eyes on the commanding presence. At the end of this argument, Marshall, the greatest legal mind in the history of our country, was leaning forward, "with his tall and gaunt figure bent over as if to catch the slightest whisper, the deep furrows of his cheek expanded with emotion, and his eyes suffused with tears." Mr. Webster had finished the theory of his case. He had explained the authority of the Constitution and the dangers that might arise from allowing any State laws to infringe it. He now turned toward the chief justice. "Sir, you may destroy this little institution. It is weak. It is in your hands. I know it is one of the lesser lights in the literary horizon of our country. You may put

it out. But, if you do, you must carry out your work. You must extinguish, one after another, all those greater lights of science which, for more than a century, have thrown their radiance over our land. It is, sir, as I have said, a small college. And yet there are those who love it.”

Here the orator himself broke down. His voice failed. He could not go on. When he recovered, and ended in a few words of almost equal power, he had completed an argument in which grasp of his subject, persuasive distinctness of thought, and adroit appeal to the prejudices of the great lawyers on the bench were so mingled that in this end the far-reaching doctrine of our government was established. Mr. Pinkney, the leading lawyer in the land, believed the case was won more by eloquence than by law.

Other cases followed, confirming the reputation already made. One of them

should be mentioned for an anecdote connected with it which lights up the nature of Mr. Webster's legal thought. In what is known as the Rhode Island case, a young attorney named Bosworth was sent to explain the facts and the conclusions reached by the lawyers who had prepared the case. Mr. Webster listened to the explanation, and felt that something was wanting. "Is that all?" he asked. The young attorney then modestly offered a theory of his own, which his superiors had rejected. "Mr. Bosworth," exclaimed Webster, "by the blood of all the Bosworths who fell on Bosworth field, that is *the* point of the case." That, in the law as in politics, was the nature of his mind. With judgment and tact he listened to what others contributed, and then he picked out *the* point and brought all his powers to bear on that. Hence the success of that fairness to opponents, which made him state their arguments better than

they had been able to formulate them for themselves. He could afford to give the opposition a powerful statement; for he relied on no trick or subtlety, but on the clear presentation of deep-seated truths. This distinct vision far into the life of the great themes which he was called upon to treat is the highest quality of his mind, and it was in control of an eloquence which had become as pure as it was magnificent.

“When I was a young man,” once said Mr. Webster, “and first entered the law, my style of oratory was as round and florid as Choate’s. I do not think it is the best. It is not according to my taste.” That taste, once acquired, almost never left him,—never, perhaps, before that turn in his life which made him the defender of errors which he had done so much to expose, and then but seldom. At this high noon of his gifts and character he planted himself firmly on great general principles, rely-

ing almost wholly on a well-stored memory for what support they needed. Occasional bursts of grandeur, always timed with judgment, and alluring digressions to refresh the attention, chosen with the same instinct, relieve the steady march of his exposition. When he was a law student in Boston, he gave his best analysis to the characters of men and the methods of successful lawyers; and at the height of his fame it was in the knowledge of the human mind and heart that he most excelled.

The years in which these law cases were being argued also saw the delivery of the memorial addresses on which so much of their author's renown is built. The first — and, in the orator's own opinion, the best — was made at Plymouth in 1820, to commemorate the landing of the Pilgrims. John Adams, who listened to the oration and who had heard Pitt, Fox, Burke, and Sheridan, wrote to Mr. Webster that Burke was no longer

entitled to be called the most consummate orator of modern times. "This oration," he said, "will be read five hundred years hence with as much rapture as it was heard. It ought to be read at the end of every century, and indeed at the end of every year, forever and ever." And he also said, "If there be an American who can read it without tears, I am not that American."

The subject gave Mr. Webster an opportunity to put into an eloquent popular form, which should move a large gathering, those principles of American nationality which were the basis of his thought as a statesman and as an orator. The orator's power of voice and presence did much, of course, to melt and thrill the audience before him; but the immediate effect was so nearly equalled by the lasting influence that Adams's prophecy has been a fair statement of the truth. One passage above all probably worked more potently on after events than any

other single burst of indignation against the traffic in slaves : —

“In the sight of our law the African slave-trader is a pirate and a felon ; and, in the sight of Heaven, an offender far beyond the ordinary depth of human guilt. There is no brighter page of our history than that which records the measures which have been adopted by the government at an early day, and at different times since, for the suppression of this traffic ; and I would call on all the true sons of New England to co-operate with the laws of man and the justice of Heaven. If there be, within the extent of our knowledge or influence, any participation in this traffic, let us pledge ourselves here, upon the rock of Plymouth, to extirpate and destroy it. It is not fit that the land of the Pilgrims should bear the shame longer. I hear the sound of the hammer, I see the smoke of the furnaces where manacles and fetters are still forged for human

limbs. I see the visages of those who by stealth and at midnight labor in this work of hell, foul and dark, as may become the artificers of such instruments of misery and torture. Let that spot be purified, or let it cease to be of New England. Let it be purified, or let it be set aside from the Christian world. Let it be put out of the circle of human sympathies and human regards, and let civilized man henceforth have no communion with it.”

Years after, when he was forced to explain them away, those sentences met Mr. Webster at every turn. With it went hand in hand this other passage from the same oration : —

“Conscience, in the cause of religion and the worship of the Deity, prepares the mind to act and to suffer beyond almost all other causes. It sometimes gives an impulse so irresistible that no fetters of power or of opinion can withstand it. History instructs us that this

love of religious liberty, a compound sentiment in the breast of man, made up of the clearest sense of right and the highest conviction of duty, is able to look the sternest despotism in the face, and, with means apparently most inadequate, to shake principalities and powers. There is a boldness, a spirit of daring, in religious reformers not to be measured by the general rules which control men's purposes and actions. If the hand of power be laid upon it, this only seems to augment its force and its elasticity, and to cause its action to be more formidable and violent. Human invention has devised nothing, human power has compassed nothing, that can forcibly restrain it, when it breaks forth. Nothing can stop it but to give way to it: nothing can check it but indulgence. It loses its power only when it has gained its object. The principle of toleration, to which the world has come so slowly, is at once the most just and

the most wise of all principles. Even when religious feeling takes a character of extravagance and enthusiasm, and seems to threaten the order of society and shake the columns of the social edifice, its principal danger is in its restraint. If it be allowed indulgence and expansion, like the elemental fires, it only agitates, and, perhaps, purifies the atmosphere; while its efforts to throw off restraint would burst the world asunder."

One of the most brilliant prophecies in history was made in this oration, and of no part of it did Mr. Webster himself seem more proud. It was when, explaining what influence subdivision of property had on government, he met the apparent exception of France by declaring that, "if the government do not change the law, the law in half a century will change the government; and that this change will be, not in favor of the power of the crown, as some Euro-

pean writers have supposed, but against it." In these great popular orations such clear perception as this is scattered throughout. One sober passage, answering the objection that American society furnishes no class of men of fortune and leisure, boldly declares that the promotion of taste and literature are not primary objects of political institutions.

The second in time among the renowned memorial addresses was delivered in 1825, to commemorate the battle of Bunker Hill. Standing on a platform at the foot of the hill on which the victory was won, Mr. Webster addressed a multitude rising on the slopes above him. It was an occasion which appealed intensely to the orator's imagination, and his mind dwelt on it for some time before the day. The address to the soldiers, beginning, "Venerable men," gave him little trouble; for, as he said, he had lived in times that taught him how to appeal to men like them. What

caused him anxiety was the opening and the address to LaFayette. Any one looking over the speech, and seeing the differing tones in which each part of the audience is addressed, will be reminded of the solidity with which the speaker studied his audience. The crowd wept and cheered ; but two passages, above all the rest, brought intense emotion. One was the often quoted tribute to the veterans : the other, that final touch of beauty in the reasons for the monument. This, like all of Mr. Webster's effects, loses by standing alone ; for even to the reader he has, to a peculiar degree, the power of accumulation, of stirring the emotions gradually to the point where, rising to a warmer glow, he starts the tears or touches off the accumulated enthusiasm. Nevertheless, a few lines may stand here to mark the first point at which the great assembly was carried away by the orator : " We wish, finally, that the last object to the sight of him

who leaves his native shore, and the first to gladden him who revisits it, may be something which shall remind him of the liberty and glory of his country. Let it rise ! Let it rise, till it meet the sun in his coming ! Let the earliest light of the morning gild it, and parting day linger and play on its summit !”

This oration, in Mr. Webster’s opinion, expressed just before its delivery, was a failure,—a kind of soft thaw, like the weather in which it was composed ; and he continued to prefer the earlier effort. Like his other speeches celebrating occasions, and unlike his arguments in the Senate and in the courts of law, it is less a logical than an emotional whole. It is a series of subjects strung together loosely, but so handled as to give hearers of every sort the keen glow of pathetic fervor. Two anecdotes about the composition of this address illustrate Mr. Webster’s habit of thought. Devoted to country life, even to the very last, he

composed some of his most renowned outbursts standing in brooks with rod in hand. His son Fletcher, approaching from behind, saw his father, holding the gun in his left hand, step impressively forward, raise his right hand, and break out with "Venerable men!" Another tale recounts that the address to La-Fayette had a similar origin. After long hours of empty fishing in his yacht, the orator landed a prize; and, as it dangled in the air, he cried, "Welcome! all hail! and thrice welcome, citizen of two hemispheres!" In their manner of birth also, these patriotic orations differed from the argumentatic speeches. Here he studied the language at the centres of effect; but, in such masterpieces as the reply to Hayne, he jotted down a few topics, and trusted to the moment for the words. The result is not accurately to be decided, for Mr. Webster corrected a good deal. The glowing end of the great reply has been quieted,

the melting appeals to sentiment in the Dartmouth College case have been elided, and his general practice was to go over every speech and argument to soften the passages brought out by the moment in a blaze too bright for his classic taste. There is a tale that on the morning following the Adams and Jefferson eulogy he threw the manuscript to a student with the request, "Please take that discourse, and cut out all the Latin words."

This tribute to Adams and Jefferson, which came a year after the Bunker Hill oration, left Mr. Webster's renown as a memorial speaker as high as it ever rose. There were famous speeches later, such as the second Bunker Hill, June 17, 1843, and the Character of Washington, February 22, 1832; but none of them carried his reputation higher. In this tribute the best-known bit is the imaginary speech, "Sink or swim, live or die, survive or perish, I give my hand and

my heart to this vote," put into the mouth of John Adams in favor of declaring independence. Nothing in all his writings shows more clearly his historical imagination, the vividness with which he saw past scenes, became alive with their spirit, and filled himself with the souls of other men. He ended this speech in the early morning, and the page was wet with tears. This confession, made by him later to President Fillmore, is the most direct testimony we have to his mood in composition; but without it we could guess that so completely oratorical a temperament—especially when the talent excited the emotions not by barbaric splendor of language so much as by simple words alive with the fire of their meaning—must compose successfully only when its own nature vibrated finely and deeply to the workings of its own genius. So wholly had the orator identified himself with the intense scene which he lived

through as the soul of Adams that letters from all sides sought the origin of the speech, and scepticism met the statement that it was imagined.

From another point of view, also, this oration turns an entertaining light on Mr. Webster's character. Few read it without being struck by the change in treatment marked by the change in subject. For Adams is all the real ardor and most of the space, for Jefferson only decorous praise, so that a hearer or reader, learning only from these words, might well suppose that Jefferson's importance in the history of his country was far less than that of his companion statesman. The Federalist prejudices of Ebenezer Webster still lived in Daniel.

During these fruitful years, while he was building some of the most enduring pillars of his fame as a lawyer and as a master of patriotic eloquence, his activity had also important results in other fields. Soon after leaving Congress, he

opposed the compromise of 1819,—a fact of which the interest lies in his later attitude on the slavery question. A year later, as a delegate to the convention for revising the Constitution of Massachusetts, he made two lucid and effective arguments, one favoring the retention of a property basis for representation in the Senate, the other aiding an effort to make judicial officers removable by the governor and council upon the address of two-thirds instead of a majority of each branch of the legislature.

The permanent arguments for an independent judiciary, at least as preserved in his works, are stated briefly and with little attempt at eloquence. The plea for property representation, a more elaborate address, is full of ripe thought firmly expounded. He was opposing Democratic prejudices and laying himself open to suspicion and to the kind of misrepresentation of which he received

so much later, and of which an example may be found in Theodore Parker's treatment of this address and of Mr. Webster's early speeches in favor of commerce. Whatever may be said of his later relation to material interests, the respect which he showed at this period for property is accepted to-day as a proof of the useful and vital nature of his thought. His argument before the convention was that there ought to be a difference in origin between the two houses, and that, as one branch was based on population, property was the best basis for the other. Shrewdness in answering objections shared by most American citizens is noticeable throughout this argument. "It has been said that we propose to give to property, merely as such, a control over the people, universally considered. But this I take to be not at all the true nature of the proposition. The Senate is not to be a check on the people, but

on the House of Representatives. It is the case of an authority given to one agent to check or control another."

He drew a vivid and distinct picture of "the mischievous influence of the popular power when disconnected with property," in the case of Rome, at the time when her liberty fell under the arm of Cæsar. The majority could be reached by bribes and largesses, and used to overpower the substantial citizens. "Property was in the hands of one description of men, and power in those of another; and the balance of the constitution was destroyed." It was because the popular magistrates represented those who had not a stake in the Commonwealth that Rome laid her neck at the feet of her conqueror. The part of property in the English Revolution of 1688 and in our own war for independence was also touched upon. With restrained earnestness the orator pleaded that this question should not be confused

with the power of a few rich men, but looked upon as concerning the rights of property distributed among many ; for the proposal was to continue the practice of apportioning senators according to the entire amount of property in the districts. The victory was won at the time ; but shortly after the principle was wiped out of the American nation, apparently forever.

III.

IN 1823 Mr. Webster returned to Congress as a representative from the Boston district, and was put at the head of the Judiciary Committee by Mr. Clay. In preparing and defending a bill to amend the judicial system, he accomplished a valuable task; but the most brilliant expression of his powers given in the first few years after his return was in the speech which he made in January of 1824, on his own resolution to provide by law for defraying the expense of a commissioner to Greece. Of this speech he wrote, in 1831, "I think I am more fond of this child than of any of the family."

The public expected a display of fire, but Mr. Webster had no such intention. The Greek revolution aroused his sympathies; but what he sought was an opportunity to refute the doctrines of the Holy Alliance, affirming the right

of absolute governments to form concerts for the purpose of crushing rebellion anywhere,—any insurrection threatening them all by defying the pretensions on which they are founded. As Mr. Webster summarized it, “The end and scope of this amalgamated policy are neither more nor less than this,—to interfere, by force, for any government, against any people who may resist it. Be the state of the people what it may, they shall not rise: be the government what it will, it shall not be opposed.” Nowhere, he believed, but in this country, and perhaps in England, were these monstrous principles likely to be resisted. “Human liberty may yet, perhaps, be obliged to repose its principal hopes on the intelligence and vigor of the Saxon race.” To the objection that it was not an American affair, that the thunder rolled only at a distance, that, whatever others might suffer, we should remain safe, Mr. Webster replied: “I

think it is a sufficient answer to say to this that we are one of the nations of the earth ; that we have an interest, therefore, in the preservation of that system of national law and national intercourse which has heretofore subsisted, so beneficially for all.”

The increase of the commercial spirit and the intercourse of nations had given us a high concern in the principles upon which that intercourse was founded, but Mr. Webster was not willing to rely only on the ground of direct interest. He appealed to all that we had gained from the principles of lawful resistance, and asked if the duty was not imposed upon us to give our weight to the side of liberty and justice. Our right to interfere, if the renewed combination of the European Continental sovereigns against the newly established free States of South America should be made, was no more clear than our right to protest if the same combination were directed

against the smallest state in Europe. "We shall not, I trust, act upon the notion of dividing the world with the Holy Alliance, and complain of nothing done by them in their hemisphere if they will not interfere with ours." He did not advise armed intervention, for he drew clearly the line between the practicable and the impossible; but he did plead for all the help that moral sympathy could give to a struggling people. Of the Holy Alliance he said: "They might indeed prefer that we should express no dissent from the doctrines they have avowed and the application which they have made of those doctrines to the law of Greece. But I trust we are not disposed to leave them in any doubt as to our sentiments upon these important subjects."

The next of the questions of universal interest, then and now, upon which Mr. Webster spoke words which retain their weight through changing times, was the

tariff. He made a strong argument for the *laissez-faire* doctrine in 1824 ; but, as he modified his position radically four years later, it will be well to notice first the changes that about this time disturbed his private life, since they are closely connected with the change of tone that, little by little, was to show itself in his public career.

Grace Fletcher Webster, often spoken of by the orator in after days as the mother of his children, apparently had no small rôle in keeping alert, while she lived, those high principles which her husband had breathed in with the New Hampshire mountain air. Her upright New England faith and sweet loyalty must have been one of the strongest barriers resisting the temptations which lay before the impressionable statesman. Bits from her latest letters give the feeling of her character. One written Jan. 14, 1827, ends : —

“I received with delight Mr. Canning’s speech in Parliament. He is a jewel in the crown of Great Britain. Such a mind is one of Heaven’s best gifts. Every other earthly possession is dross to it. You will think, I fancy, that I am in the heroic vein this morning. I do feel inspired, with two letters from you and reading Mr. Canning’s speech. But I am,

“As ever, entirely yours,

“GRACE WEBSTER.”

Another begins : —

Boston, Jan. 18, 1827.

“I have been reading this morning a speech of yours, my beloved husband, which makes me hail this anniversary of your birth with increased delight. May heaven add blessings with years ! and many, many may it add to a life so valued and so valuable ! I pity the man so dead to every sentiment, not only of

honor, but honesty, that could need an argument to convince him of the justice of the claim you urged ; and I blush for the honor of our country, that there should be a majority of such sordid souls in Congress. I hope you will pardon me for meddling with such high matters.”

In December of the same year, when she was ill, she begins : —

FRIDAY MORNING, 11 o'clock,
December, 1827.

“The first tribute of my heart is to the God who gives me strength to write ; and the first of my pen to you, my best beloved.”

The next note is the last. It begins :

“I wrote you yesterday, my beloved husband, a very poor letter ; but I flatter myself that a poor letter from me will be as acceptable as a good one from another.”

She died in January, 1828; and in 1829 Mr. Webster married Caroline Le Roy, of New York, who brought him money and social position, and nothing else that can be traced in his life. In the same year he lost Ezekiel, the strong-willed brother, another of those close influences that held the early healthy odor of New England ideals about him. As early as June, 1827, he had been elected, somewhat against his will, to the vacant Massachusetts seat in the national Senate. During the year following his wife's death he voted and spoke for the "tariff of abominations"; and from that period he came to be recognized more and more as the representative of rich New England business men. In the year following Ezekiel's death and his second marriage, he gave the greatest exhibition of all his powers, and kept himself at his highest level; but after this he steadily declined from a height at which his altering nature could no longer sustain itself.

The character of American statesmen had changed since the shining days of Hamilton and Washington, and the nature of American thought was feeling the first results of the rising tide of mercantile excitement. The Boston companions of Mr. Webster, after his greatest successes, were worldly and convivial. He has said himself that his health was lowered by eating and drinking too much, and there is no doubt that he came to absorb alcohol with something like the ease with which he absorbed ideas. The easy-going, free, jolly, almost indifferent way in which he naturally took life received aid from this change in companionship and habit, and possibly, though less surely, from the accompanying increase in his miscellaneous relations with women. At the same time his looseness in affairs of money began to do its work. "We all know," said R. C. Winthrop, in his eulogy after Mr. Webster's death, "that, while he could

master the great questions of national finance, and was never weary in maintaining the importance of upholding the national credit, he never cared quite enough about his own finances, or took particular pains to preserve his own personal credit. We all know that he was sometimes impatient of differences, and sometimes arrogant and overbearing toward opponents. His own consciousness of surpassing powers, and the flatteries — I had almost said the idolatries — of innumerable friends, would account for much more of all this than he ever displayed." All these tendencies grew along together. Although he seemed to pay few of his larger bills, hotel keepers deeming it an honor to have him as a guest and wine merchants being glad to make him gifts, although his practice was most lucrative and his fees enormous, he was always in need of money; and nobody could tell what became of his receipts. His easy nature gave freely

when there was cash about him ; and stories are numerous to show his generous impulses toward the needy, and his carelessness in paying one bill several times at intervals, if only the creditor could find him with money in his purse.

One result of his irresponsible mode of life was that New England business men later formed a trust, the income to go to him, and then, if she survived him, to his wife ; and it is believed, though not known with the same certainty, that presents from individuals interested in Mr. Webster's genius and in the tariff were frequent and enormous. Some of those who came to be the intimates of his daily life, were trivial sycophants ; and all these things together—the change in his friends, the physical effect of too much dissipation, the moral influence of being largely supported by monopolists—prepared him for his retreat from some of the positions he had so nobly held. He was still to raise his fame

higher, as the Great Defender of the Constitution ; but the influences which finally accomplished so much are best noticed when they came into his life.

The tariff question has been so continually thrashed over ever since the war that Mr. Webster's principal stands need be mentioned only in the most general terms. He had opposed the tariff of 1816, he made a great speech against that of 1824, and he voted for "the tariff of abominations" in 1828. Of course, it is not difficult for a shrewd man to base a change of principle on a pretended or actual change in conditions ; and such is Mr. Webster's defence. At first he had laid stress on the constitutional argument ; but in 1824 the bulk of his speech was a full and lucid statement of the well-known *laissez-faire* doctrines, in moderate form, skilfully supported by contemporary examples. This exposition stands to-day as one of the most comprehensible and persuasive

utterances on the subject ever made in the United States. He was the ablest opponent of Henry Clay's famous "American policy." In 1827 and 1828 he supported the "bill of abomination" on the ground that "his constituents" had invested their money on the faith of what had become the law. There is certainly no logical inconsistency, but the change was universally connected with Mr. Webster's growing relations with a class of men different from those who had helped to mould his early thought. Colonel Hayne was able to give later, in the great debate, the only thrust which Mr. Webster but feebly met, when he said: "On that occasion, sir, the gentleman assumed a position which commanded the respect and admiration of his country. . . . With a profound sagacity, a fulness of knowledge, and a richness of illustration that have never been surpassed, he maintained and established the principles of

commercial freedom on a foundation never to be shaken. . . . Sir, when I recollect the position which the gentleman once occupied, and that which he now holds in public estimation, in relation to this subject, it is not at all surprising that the tariff should be hateful to his ears.”

The greatest among those early traditions was now, however, to have its most glorious expression. Although the commercial spirit was settling over the land, one great ideal topic of debate was at the height of its existence. The Constitution was in the air. Everybody talked about it. Multitudes would listen to a discussion of it. Whenever two or three statesmen were gathered together, they compared ideas about it. We who have grown up since the war settled the last of the vital constitutional questions by the most conclusive of all arguments, cannot readily conceive the reality which then clothed, in the gen-

eral mind, that magic word. We no longer appeal to it. They appealed, on the most critical of all their problems, to little else. The extension of slavery was involved in it, and the right to destroy the Union was the centre of it. Straining every nerve to bend it one way or the other, stood on one side the South, led by the cool and penetrating mind of Calhoun; on the other, the North, hardly knowing the solidest foundations of its faith until they were pointed out by the eloquence of the Great Defender.

When he entered the brightest stage of this mighty duel, Daniel Webster was a sight to rivet every eye. His frame, grown larger, but not yet flabby, gave new majesty and potency to his face and voice and carriage; and his mind, just turning the summit of its greatness, was spurred to its most tremendous efforts by the universal excitement which centred in this momentous question. As Mr.

Webster strolled about the streets of Boston, loitering before the windows, looking at everything, everybody turned to look at him, even those who never guessed who he was. His effect on the most casual passer was hypnotic. He gave the impression of immense, slumbering power. He could go on without effort, and still be great, because the force of his mind was in fundamental principles, universal truths, with which he induced the Supreme Court to overrule decided cases, with which he penetrated to the heart of the issue in political controversy. In the war about the Constitution he was, therefore, always ready. When he was suddenly called to the critical battle, he had been preparing during his lifetime. To one who asked him if the reply to Hayne was extemporaneous, he replied, "Young man, there is no such thing as extemporaneous acquisition."

The doctrine of nullification — that,

instead of the federal government being the sole judge of its own powers, each State retained the right to decide for itself whether a federal law was constitutional — rested on the theory that the national union was a compact existing only during the consent of the separate members. The head exponent of this theory was John C. Calhoun, who, after years of debate with him, said that Mr. Webster stated an opponent's arguments more fairly than anybody he had ever seen. In taking his stand for union, on which he ardently believed liberty and happiness depended, Mr. Webster answered the subtleties of the nullifiers, as a necessary step in strengthening the position of the North ; but he relied still more on the explanation of consequences and the appeal to patriotism. The temperate tone of a large mind pervades his language on this vital subject. "My son," he once said, "I war with principles, and not with men." At this

period his thought seemed loaded with the weightiest principles and lightened with the brightest truths.

This reply to Hayne and Nullification is called in his private correspondence "number one among my political efforts." Its importance is now known to all the world. "The discourses at Plymouth Rock and Bunker Hill were not for an hour," says Judge Chamberlain, "nor was the Great Reply. In the days of their utterance, they were resplendent, unprecedented eloquence; but they spoke truest when they became wisdom to Lincoln and valor to Grant, they rang loudest when heard along the front of battle, and inspired deeds of immortal heroism on a hundred fields."

This speech was immediately the result of accident. While Robert Young Hayne, of South Carolina, was speaking in January, 1830, on a resolution to restrict the sales of public lands, Mr. Webster dropped into the Senate, after

the adjournment of the Supreme Court. He arose to reply ; but, as the Senate adjourned, he spoke the next day, delivering an eloquent argument, which has been almost submerged by his more brilliant effort a few days later, generally called the "Reply to Hayne." The next day Hayne replied, refusing to consent to an adjournment which should enable his opponent to be present without neglecting the important case in court. "Let the discussion proceed," said Mr. Webster. "I am willing to receive the gentleman's fire." Mr. Hayne completed his speech several days later, and Mr. Webster was prevented from replying at once only by an adjournment.

He spoke the day following, from few notes hastily prepared. Edward Everett tells us that in the intervals between these speeches Mr. Webster was the only person in Washington who seemed entirely at his ease. The attacks of the

nullifiers on the Constitution had grown rapidly fiercer and more organized, and the loyal citizens were not at all sure of their answer. The Southerners seemed to gain strength with every combat. That some great blow was needed was felt throughout the North. After dinner Mr. Webster lay on the sofa, dozing or asleep, according to his habit, when he began to laugh softly to himself. To inquiry he replied that he had just thought of a way to turn Colonel Hayne's quotation about Banquo's ghost against himself, and was going to get up and make a note of it, which he did, and then continued his nap.

The audience which awaited his appearance in the Senate Chamber was intense with anxiety. The orator's first step was to lessen the tension, and prepare them to proceed calmly over an extended argument.

"Mr. President," he began, "when the mariner has been tossed for many

days in thick weather and on an unknown sea, he naturally avails himself of the first pause in the storm, the earliest glance of the sun, to take his latitude and ascertain how far the elements have driven him from his true course. Let us imitate this prudence, and before we float further on the waves of this debate, refer to the point from which we departed, that we may at least be able to conjecture where we now are. I ask for the reading of the resolution before the Senate.”

By the time it was read, the assembly, with nerves relaxed, was watching with an easier expectation. Mr. Webster began to banter his opponent, and turn away the personal elements in his attack. Although having no distinguished gift of humor, and using it sparingly for that reason, he loved it in others, and could himself bring enough of it to his assistance to carry him over places where nothing else would serve so

well. It is said that the deftness and enjoyment with which he turned Colonel Hayne's quotation from "Macbeth" first filled his followers in the Senate with confidence. After a little more repartee he became serious, and covered with masterly simplicity and fulness of reason all the subordinate points in his opponent's speech, first rising to rushing eloquence when he reached the end of his reply to Hayne's attack on Massachusetts.

"Mr. President, I shall enter on no encomium on Massachusetts. She needs none. There she is. Behold her, and judge for yourselves. There is her history. The world knows it by heart. The past, at least, is secure. There is Boston and Concord and Lexington and Bunker Hill; and there they will remain forever." As he went on with the famous tribute, our best eye-witness tells us, and turned his glowing eyes, intentionally or otherwise, upon a group of

Massachusetts men in one corner of the gallery, as he ended the encomium,—
“It will fall at last, if fall it must, amidst the proudest monuments of its own glory, and on the very spot of its origin,”—as these words were spoken, the New England men shed tears, like girls.

The orator's final task was before him,—by far the most grave and important duty, as he called it himself. He must say, and say with all the power within him, what were the true principles of the Constitution under which they were there assembled. “Sir, I have met the occasion, not sought it; and I shall proceed to state my own sentiments, without challenging for them any particular regard, with studied plainness, and as much precision as possible.”

With studied plainness, with a precision that has stood the hardest tests of time, with an eloquence measured to

work at once upon the minds and the emotions of a great assembly wrought to the highest pitch of interest, but an eloquence so deeply founded that it did more than any other single effort to form future American history, he proceeded to state his own sentiments. The argument is known, the glowing ending is still recited throughout the land. Its effect on those who heard it is thus recorded for us:—

“The speech was over, but the tones of the orator still lingered upon the ear; and the audience, unconscious of the close, retained their positions. The agitated countenance, the heaving breast, the suffused eye, attested the continued influence of the spell upon them. Hands that in the excitement of the moment had sought each other still remained closed in an unconscious grasp. . . .

“When the Vice-President, hastening to dissolve the spell, angrily called to

order ! order ! there never was a deeper stillness. Not a movement, not a gesture had been made, not a whisper uttered. Order ! Silence could almost have heard itself, it was so supernaturally still."

No wonder Calhoun brought down his hammer, and awoke the assembly with a start. With one long-drawn breath they departed. But in the war which Calhoun had led the greatest forensic battle had closed in a glorious victory for Mr. Webster and the North. "It crushes nullification," said James Madison, "and must hasten an abandonment of secession." One of those who heard the speech wrote of the orator: "He was a totally different thing from any public speaker I ever heard. I sometimes felt as if I were looking at a mammoth treading, at an equable and stately pace, his native cane-brake, and without apparent consciousness crushing obstacles which nature had never designed as impediments to him."

This speech did much to extend Mr. Webster's reputation in parts of the country where he had been little known. He did not rest on one splendid effort, but continued to fight the battle for nationalism against the South in the Senate, making a series of arguments which, although overshadowed by the Reply to Hayne, were of constant value in giving confidence to the North. The best known of them is the long speech of 1833, in which he maintained, against Calhoun, that the Union was not a federation of States. While he was thus continuing his work of defending the Constitution, he was proving the clearness, depth, and range of his financial understanding by endeavoring to check Andrew Jackson's onslaught on the national bank. In 1832 he spoke in favor of renewing the charter; and, when the President vetoed the bill, Mr. Webster mingled a perfectly accurate exposition of the economic truths involved with a

temperate but scathing rebuke to the ignorant autocrat.

“It presents the chief magistrate of the Union in the attitude of arguing away the powers of that government over which he has been chosen to preside, and adopting for this purpose modes of reasoning which, even under the influence of all proper feeling toward high official station, it is difficult to regard as respectable. It appeals to every prejudice which may betray men into a mistaken view of their own interests, and to every passion which may lead them to disobey the impulses of their understanding. . . . It is a State paper which finds no topic too exciting for its use, no passion too inflammable for its address and its solicitation.” The President soon made his well-known *coup*, removing two Secretaries of the Treasury in order to find one who would execute his will by withdrawing the government deposits from the Bank of the United

States and put them in the State banks. Mr. Webster presented to Congress, Jan. 20, 1833, a series of resolutions adopted at a public meeting in Boston, attributing the prevailing financial distress to the President's bigotry, and spoke in support of them in the Senate. One of the shorter speeches in this series ends in a rather noticeable expression of confidence in the power of public opinion to bring good out of evil: "Political mischiefs will be repaired by political redress. That which has been unwisely done will be wisely undone; and this is the way, sir, in which our enlightened and independent people *live through their difficulties*. . . . Although these black and portentous clouds may break on our heads, and the tempest overpower us for a while, still that can never be forever overwhelmed, that can never go finally to the bottom, which truth and duty bear up." In one of these speeches against Jackson, called the "Presidential Pro-

test," occurred that famous passage declaring that the encroachment of the Executive on the other branches of the government was to be regarded as a threat against the Constitution, and treated as our fathers treated an act of Parliament which had brought as yet no suffering. "They went to war against a preamble, they fought seven years against a declaration. . . . On this question of principle, while actual suffering was yet far off, they raised their flag against a power to which, for purposes of foreign conquest and subjugation, Rome, in the height of her glory, is not to be compared,—a power which has dotted over the surface of the whole globe with her possessions and military posts, whose morning drum-beat, following the sun, and keeping company with the hours, circles the earth with one continuous strain of the martial airs of England."

During 1833 Webster made a tour of

the Western States, which was something of an ovation, although it is agreed that the style of his oratory was never popular in the sense in which Clay's was. It lacked the personal, winning quality which charmed all kinds of people equally. It did not inspire love and devotion, but, appealing so largely to the mind, was best suited to intelligent listeners, such as faced him in the Senate or on New England memorial occasions. He was not naturally a stump orator, nor had he that first requisite of a demagogue,—a constant profession of regard for the people. He mentioned them seldom, and seldom went further than that kind of abstract confidence illustrated by the close of the bank speech just quoted. His austere taste and wide judicial mind were not elements to endear him to the mass of men. Still, Mr. Webster believed in his popularity, and firmly expected to be President. Such an ambition was more

natural in a great man then than it would be now, when we take mediocrity in that office for granted. Mr. Webster had seen Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, and John Quincy Adams occupy the chair in succession. Andrew Jackson was the first ignorant popular hero put into the highest office; and Mr. Webster did not realize that the tide had turned, and the time passed when the Presidency was to be the reward of statesmanship. He felt it to be his due, and the flatterers with whom he chose to surround himself helped to fan the flame. Any one who will read the reminiscences of his intimate friend, Peter Harvey, will receive a vivid idea of the kind of man Mr. Webster now took to his bosom. The legislature of Massachusetts nominated the orator for the Presidency; and in 1836 he received the electoral vote of that State, and out of the whole convention that was all he did receive. Mr. Webster

steadily opposed both the spoils system and the tendency to reward military men with civil office, but he could not stem the tide that set in that direction with Jackson.

IV.

THE panic which Mr. Webster had so often foretold in his conflict with the President came in 1837, and at about the same time the first loud rumblings of the slavery conflict were heard in the dispute over the annexation of Texas. As his course on this momentous issue has overshadowed in the mind of posterity all the other deeds of his later years, it is well to notice how he stood in the early stages of the dispute, which culminated, as far as his career was concerned, on a certain 7th of March some thirteen years later. In 1837 he spoke thus: "I do say that the annexation of Texas would tend to prolong the duration and increase the extent of African slavery on this continent. I have long held that opinion, and I would not now suppress it for any consideration on earth. And because it does increase the evils of slavery, because it will in-

crease the number of slaves and prolong the duration of their bondage,—because it does all this, I oppose it without condition and without qualification, at this time and all times, now and forever.”

He spoke thus several times; but an important change had taken place in him, since instead of fighting in the front, where we might expect to see him, he kept in the background, and displayed his principles only occasionally, and then with seeming reluctance. The ambition to be President rather than to be a real leader, which was growing on him, made him more cautious and less intrepid, more mundane and less clear-sighted. Formerly he leaped into the thick of the fight when a blow was aimed at one of the principles he loved. Now his great powers of argument seemed turned to the invention of excuses for inaction or compromise. A few years before, in opposing the compromise tariff bill with

which Henry Clay sought to pacify South Carolina, Mr. Webster had said that the time had come to test the Constitution, and that he was not in favor of sacrificing great principles to sectional interests; and, although he finally acquiesced in this bill, it was after he had given clear proof of courage and conviction in supporting Jackson's resolute stand against the followers of Calhoun.

Even now, in 1837, he could still say, at Niblo's Garden, although such passages are too rare, words which completely answer his later sophistries: "On the general question of slavery a great portion of the community is already strongly excited. The subject has not only attracted attention as a question of politics, but it has struck a far deeper-toned chord. It has arrested the feeling of the country. It has taken strong hold on the consciences of men. He is a rash man, indeed, and little conversant with human nature, and es-

pecially has he a very erroneous estimate of the character of the people of this country, who supposes that a feeling of this kind is to be trifled with or despised. It will cause itself to be respected. It may be reasoned with: it may be made willing—I believe it is entirely willing—to fulfil all existing engagements and all existing duties, to uphold and defend the Constitution as it is established, with whatever regrets about some provisions which it does actually contain. But to coerce it into silence, to restrain its free expression, to seek to compress and confine it, warm as it is, and more heated as such endeavors would inevitably render it,—should this be attempted, I know nothing, even in the Constitution or in the Union itself, which would not be endangered by the explosion which might follow.”

In the summer of 1839 he went to England, perhaps for rest, perhaps to affect the Presidential nomination; and,

when he landed in December, he received the news that General Harrison had been made the standard-bearer of the Whigs, the supporters of the tariff and the inheritors since 1834 of some of the leading principles of Federalism. Mr. Webster accepted his misfortune calmly, and threw himself into the campaign, making many speeches with decided effect. The Whig victory resulted in giving him the office of Secretary of State, which he filled so well that his reputation mounted high in a new field. Senator Lodge, one of the most judicial of his biographers, believes that nobody except John Quincy Adams ever showed higher qualities in the State Department. Among the many useful negotiations tactfully performed, the Ashburton Treaty is by far the best known. There were many grievances between England and America; and Mr. Webster showed patience, skill, and fairness in carrying through the work, settling the east half

of the northern boundary and introducing a valuable extradition clause. It is noticeable that he defended the treaty against his own party, and stood by the President when the rest of the cabinet resigned. He also carried through a treaty with Portugal, and soon after showed his ability in other fields still great, though less than it had been, by such law arguments as the Girard Will case (1840), and such eloquence as the second Bunker Hill oration (1843). In his constitutional reasoning as Secretary of State he was doubtless enormously helped by Justice Story, to whom he wrote in 1842: "You can do more for me than all the rest of the world, because you can give me the lights I most want; and, if you furnish them, I shall be confident they will be true lights. I shall trouble you greatly the next three months." Letters from each of these men to the other were kept by Mr. Webster from publication after Story's

death, in order that his own fame might not be lessened,—a fact which is established beyond doubt, but seems incredible when we think of the Daniel Webster of 1820.

At the end of 1842, his principal tasks being accomplished, he resigned to practise law and to live at Marshfield, on the Massachusetts seaside farm, where he still took so keen a joy in nature. Anecdotes of this time show that his joviality and spontaneous feelings for large and healthy things were still strong in him. That love of the open air and the beauty of nature, which did so much to give simplicity and size to his style and thought, cannot, perhaps, be better shown than by one of his letters written some years later from this country home, with its old fort and its mixed visitors, of whom Audubon was one: “But the morning itself few people, inhabitants of cities, know anything about. Among all our good people, not one in a thou-

sand sees the sun rise once a year. They know nothing of the morning. Their idea of it is that it is that part of the day which comes along after a cup of coffee and a beefsteak or a piece of toast. With them morning is not a new issuing of light, a new bursting forth of the sun, a new waking up of all that has life, from a sort of temporary death, to behold again the works of God, the heavens and the earth. It is only a part of the domestic day belonging to breakfast, to reading the newspapers, answering notes, sending the children to school, and giving orders for dinner. The first faint streak of light, the earliest purpling of the east, which the lark springs up to greet, and the deeper and deeper coloring into orange and red, till at length the 'glorious sun is seen, regent of day,' — this they never enjoy ; for they never see it."

Mr. Webster was not a candidate for the Presidency in 1844, but supported

Henry Clay. In the following year he returned to the Senate, four days after the passage of the resolutions annexing Texas. The slavery issue was now covering most of the political sky. It is worth noticing that a speech delivered by Mr. Webster in 1844 at Faneuil Hall is not printed in his works. In that speech he said: "What! when all the civilized world is opposed to slavery; when morality denounces it; when Christianity denounces it; when everything respected, everything good, bears one united witness against it,—is it for America,—America, the land of Washington, the model republic of the world,—is it for America to come to its assistance, and to insist that the maintenance of slavery is necessary to the support of her institutions?" These flashes, however, do not indicate the general tone of his speeches or the impression which was growing on the country—an impression fairly enough represented by John

Quincy Adams's words, uttered several years before—that Mr. Webster was “tampering with the South on the slavery and Texas questions.”

In the war measures which occupied Congress after his return Mr. Webster took little part. In the matter of the Oregon boundary and the “54-40 or fight” outcry he helped on a peaceable solution; and he answered successfully some bitter charges of improper expenditure connected with his work on the Ashburton treaty. The conclusion finally was that he had been, as always, careless in his accounts, but not dishonest.

In 1847 he voted for the “Wilmot Proviso,” forbidding slavery in territory thereafter to be acquired; and he opposed also territorial aggrandizement, mainly because it would make the slavery question more difficult. He presented to Congress the resolutions of the Massachusetts legislature against the

extension of slavery; but some of his speeches on this subject at this time are already suspiciously mild, and dwell more on the legal than on the moral aspect of the problem, putting emphasis on the danger of interfering with the constitutional rights of the slaveholders.

The year 1848, a sad one for Mr. Webster, made him more than ever a disappointed man, weakened by political resentment and private misfortune. To break what was left of his spirit, a son and a daughter died within three days of each other. The orator, now sixty-six years old, wearied and shattered by intense effort crowded into short spaces, by disease, bereavement, and disappointment, prepared his own burial-place at Marshfield, with no more joy in life, and with one absorbing, trivial hope. Young men who heard him speak could not understand his fame. Often he was pompous, heavy, empty, though once and again he would blaze up with the old

fire and inspiration. He was in no condition to meet the changing times. To the Free Soil Party, afterward the Republicans, belonged the bold and conquering stand; to the Whigs, the faltering and losing one. And Mr. Webster stood with the Whigs.

A candidate again in 1848, he received in the convention half as many votes as Scott, Taylor being nominated, with Clay second. In a speech at Marshfield Mr. Webster said that the nomination was not fit to be made, but that it was dictated by "the sagacious, wise, and far-seeing doctrine of availability." A few years later he was to say at Buffalo, "Gentlemen, I believe in party, I am a party man." Years earlier he had said of Washington: "His principle it was to act right, and to trust the people for support; his principle it was not to follow the lead of sinister and selfish ends, nor to rely on the little arts of party delusion to obtain public sanction for such a course. Born

for his country and for the world, he did not give up to party what was meant for mankind. The consequence is that his fame is as durable as his principles, as lasting as truth and virtue themselves. While the hundreds whom party excitement and temporary circumstances and casual combinations have raised into transient notoriety sink again, like thin bubbles bursting and dissolving into the great ocean, Washington's fame is like the rock which bounds that ocean, and at whose feet its billows are destined to break harmlessly forever. . . .

“Among other admonitions, Washington has left us, in his last communication to his country, an exhortation against the excesses of party spirit. A fire not to be quenched, he yet conjures us not to fan and feed the flame. Undoubtedly, gentlemen, it is the greatest danger of our system and of our time. Undoubtedly, if that system should be overthrown, it will be the work of excessive party spirit.”

In 1850 he took his final stand on slavery. As late as February 14 of that year he said, in a letter, that he believed there was no real danger of the breaking-up of the government. A few months later he was using the danger of a disruption as the principal argument in support of Henry Clay's so-called compromise, which was no compromise at all, but an enormous victory for the South, throwing open thousands of miles to slavery, with no protection even for that part of the territory lying above the line of the Missouri Compromise, and re-enacting and emphasizing the Fugitive Slave Law. On March 7 Mr. Webster made in the Senate the most famous of his later speeches, stirring up all of his dormant powers to plead the cause of the slaveholders. He dwelt upon the constitutional rights, which everybody knew, opposed the Wilmot Proviso on the plea that, as slave labor would not pay in the North-west, he would not "irritate" the South or

“needlessly take pains to reaffirm an ordinance of nature, nor to re-enact the will of God.” He brought all of his logical acumen to a legal defence of the Fugitive Slave Law, and no other part of his speech created such pain and indignation in the North. Mr. Webster’s desertion did something to cover up the flames; but they only burned the more fiercely, for it was seen, by the unrelenting men who thought now with the Webster of 1820, that all hope of confining slavery to its original area until the North had grown great and the South poor was gone, and that the crash might as well come when it would.

Some of the effect of this speech may be indicated by its influence on the philosopher who had so coolly kept aloof from the controversy. “I,” said Emerson, “have lived all my life without suffering any inconvenience from American slavery. I never saw it, I never heard the whip. I never felt the check on my free speech and action until the

other day, when Mr. Webster, by his personal influence, brought the Fugitive Slave Law on the country. I say Mr. Webster; for, though the bill was not his, it is yet notorious that he was the life and soul of it, that he gave it all he had. It cost him his life; and under the shadow of his great name inferior men sheltered themselves, threw their ballots for it, and made the law. . . . Nobody doubts that Daniel Webster could make a good speech. Nobody doubts that there were good and plausible things to be said on the part of the South. But this is not a question of ingenuity, not a question of syllogisms, but of sides. How came he there? . . . But the question which history will ask is broader. In the final hour, when he was forced by the peremptory necessity of the closing armies to take a side, did he take the part of great principles, the side of humanity and justice, or the side of abuse and oppression and chaos? . . . He did as immoral men usually do,—

made very low bows to the Christian Church and went through all the Sunday decorums, but, when allusion was made to the question of duty and the sanctions of morality, he very frankly said, at Albany, 'some higher law, something existing somewhere between here and the heaven, I do not know where.' And, if the reporters say true, this wretched atheism found some laughter in the company."

Seward called Mr. Webster a "traitor to the cause of freedom," Harriet Martineau accused him of "folly and treachery," and that gentlest of men, the poet Whittier, wrote :—

Of all we loved and honored, naught
Save power remains ;
A fallen angel's pride of thought,
Still strong in chains.

All else is gone. From those great eyes
The soul has fled ;
When faith is lost, when honor dies,
The man is dead.

Thirty years after, Whittier left another picture, less sad and no less kind ; and the change in him is so nearly parallel to the changing judgment of the world that part of the poem may well stand here, to lighten the impression of these last gloomy years. Thou

Whom the rich heavens did so endow
With eyes of power and Jove's own
brow,
With all the warrior strength that fills
Thy home horizon's granite hills,
With rarest gifts of heart and head
From manliest stock inherited,
New England's stateliest type of man,
In port and speech Olympian ;
Whom no one met, at first, but took
A second awed and wondering look
(As turned, perchance, the eyes of
Greece
On Phidias' unveiled masterpiece) ;
Whose words, in simplest homespun clad,
The Saxon strength of Cædmon's had.

The mistaken statesman felt no security in his new position, no serenity or

pride of right. Always on the defensive, he became more and more unfair and caustic, more and more openly made that bid for Southern support which was to avail so little. He said in Boston itself, at the Revere House, seven weeks after his great speech: "Neither you nor I shall see the legislation of the country proceed in the old harmonious way until the discussions in Congress and out of Congress upon the subject shall be in some way suppressed. Take that home with you, and take it as truth.

"I shall support no agitations having their foundation in unreal and ghastly abstractions."

He said at Capon Springs, W. Va., June 26, 1851: "Gentlemen, this North Mountain is high, the Blue Ridge higher still, the Alleghanies higher than either; and yet this 'higher land' ranges further than an eagle's flight above the highest peaks of the Alleghanies. No common vision can discern it, no com-

mon and unsophisticated conscience can feel it, the hearing of common men never learns its high behests ; and, therefore, one would think it not a safe law to be acted upon in matters of the highest practical moment. It is the code, however, of the Abolitionists of the North. . . .

“You of the South have as much right to secure your fugitive slaves as the North has to any of its rights and privileges of navigation and commerce.”

This great fall so occupied his last years that his other doings at the same period sink into insignificance in a summary story of his life. When Taylor died, (July 9, 1850), Mr. Webster became Secretary of State under Fillmore. During this second occupancy his only well-remembered act was the correspondence with the Chevalier Hulsemann, in which Mr. Webster took the opportunity to tell Austria, and Europe in general, in a manner more aggressive than was

usual with him, that we were a great nation, and that we had the right to express sympathy with any struggle for republican government. In 1852 he was a candidate again, with more confidence than ever, since Clay had been put out of the race. On the first ballot Fillmore had 133, Scott 131, Mr. Webster 29 ; and Scott was nominated on the fifty-second. Mr. Webster refused to support him, and requested his friends to vote the Democratic ticket, because — if we are to believe Peter Harvey, who, stupid as he is, was the chosen friend of the orator's last years and a reporter of the worst side of his great friend with dog-like admiration — because Franklin Pierce had always been formally friendly to Mr. Webster !

Disease had been doing its work : sorrow, bitterness, and mistrust had been doing theirs ; and, a fall from his carriage hastening the end, the broken statesman died at Marshfield Oct. 24,

1852. Religion had been a decorum in his life, not a force ; and he left for his own epitaph this : —

“ ‘Lord, I believe : help thou mine unbelief.’ Philosophical argument, especially that drawn from the vastness of the universe in comparison with the apparent insignificance of this globe, has sometimes shaken my reason for the faith which is in me ; but my heart has always assured and reassured me that the gospel of Jesus Christ must be a Divine Reality. The Sermon on the Mount cannot be a merely human production. This belief enters into the very depth of my conscience. The whole history of man proves it.

“ DANIEL WEBSTER.”

At his own request the orator's funeral was a quiet one, at Marshfield. Through all the changes of his nature, through plot and counterplot, he had

loved repose, the sky and the mountains, fresh air and grandeur; and the last rites were in harmony with the nobler character of the man. Posterity has dealt firmly, but largely with him; for a catastrophe that shook the foundations settled forever the place of Daniel Webster in our history. Because he was unable to stand patiently for the truth as he saw it in the lustre of his intellect and the health of his ambition, the world has justly called the great man weak. Because he spoke the sentences which, far above all others, became the watchwords of the North in the struggle for national integrity, his fame is high and sure in the story of America, not only as her greatest master of an eloquence which lighted up the deepest truths in her Constitution, but as the one of her sons whose powerful statement of the nation's faith did most in time of peril to insure the nation's life.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

As has clearly been explained in the preface, there is no really great and final life of Webster; and it is therefore doubly necessary for any one who would study him carefully to get as many opposite points of view as possible. To read his speeches and letters will do much. Some of the books in the following list are good, some bad. All may be suggestive. Various magazine articles, easily found in Poole, and references in diaries, letters, essays, sermons, and newspapers of the time, will do more than any one existing book to furnish the material for a substantial judgment.

I. A MEMOIR OF THE LIFE OF DANIEL WEBSTER. By S. L. Knapp. (Boston, 1831: Stimson & Clapp.) This is a brief and, of course, unfinished memoir. Another edition was published four years later, and the work was revised.

II. SPEECHES AND FORENSIC ARGUMENTS OF DANIEL WEBSTER. (Boston, 1835: Perkins, Marvin & Co.) Has most of his speeches up to that date.

III. THE BEAUTIES OF DANIEL WEBSTER. *Selected and arranged, with Essay on his Genius and Writings*, by James Rees. (New York, 1839: J. & H. S. Langley.) Also incomplete.

IV. REMINISCENCES OF CONGRESS. *A Biography of Daniel Webster*. By Charles W. March. (New York, 1850: Baker & Son.) Another edition by Scribner, New York, 1852, under title of DANIEL WEBSTER AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES.

V. DANIEL WEBSTER: WORKS. (Boston, 1851: Little & Brown.) Contains a brief biographical memoir besides his works.

VI. THE PRIVATE LIFE OF DANIEL WEBSTER. By Charles Lanman. (New York, 1852: Harper & Bros.)

VII. THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LIFE OF DANIEL WEBSTER, etc. By S. P. Lyman. (Philadelphia, 1852 : J. E. Potter & Co.)

VIII. THE AMERICAN STATESMAN; or *Illustrations of The Life and Character of Daniel Webster*. By Joseph Banvard. (Boston, 1853 : Gould & Lincoln.)

IX. LIFE AND MEMORIALS OF DANIEL WEBSTER. By S. P. Lyman. (New York, 1853 : D. Appleton & Co.) These memorials were originally written for and printed in the *New York Times*.

X. DANIEL WEBSTER : LIFE, EULOGY, AND GREAT ORATIONS. (Rochester, 1854 : W. M. Hayward & Co.) The Life is by M. L. G. Clarke, the Eulogy by W. M. Hayward.

XI. DANIEL WEBSTER : PRIVATE CORRESPONDENCE. Edited by Fletcher Webster. (Boston, 1857 : Little, Brown & Co.)

XII. DANIEL WEBSTER: ÉTUDE BIOGRAPHIQUE. (Bruxelles, 1858: F. Claassen.) This was at that time the only foreign Life of Webster.

XIII. LIFE, SPEECHES, AND MEMORIALS OF DANIEL WEBSTER, etc. By S. M. Schmucker. (Philadelphia, 1867: Quaker City Publishing House.)

XIV. LIFE OF DANIEL WEBSTER. By George T. Curtis. (New York, 1870: D. Appleton & Co.)

XV. REMINISCENCES AND ANECDOTES OF DANIEL WEBSTER. By Peter Harvey. (Boston, 1877: Little, Brown & Co.)

XVI. THE LAST YEARS OF DANIEL WEBSTER. By George T. Curtis. (New York, 1878: D. Appleton & Co.) This contains also a poem by W. C. Wilkinson, to which are attached a number of interesting notes.

XVII. MEMOIR OF DANIEL WEBSTER.

By C. H. Bell. (New England Historic-Genealogical Society, 1881: Privately printed.)

XVIII. DANIEL WEBSTER. By Henry Cabot Lodge. (Boston, 1883: Houghton, Mifflin & Co.)

XIX. DANIEL WEBSTER: REPRESENTATIVE SPEECHES. (New York, 1898: Doubleday & McClure.) Contains "Adams and Jefferson" and "Reply to Hayne."

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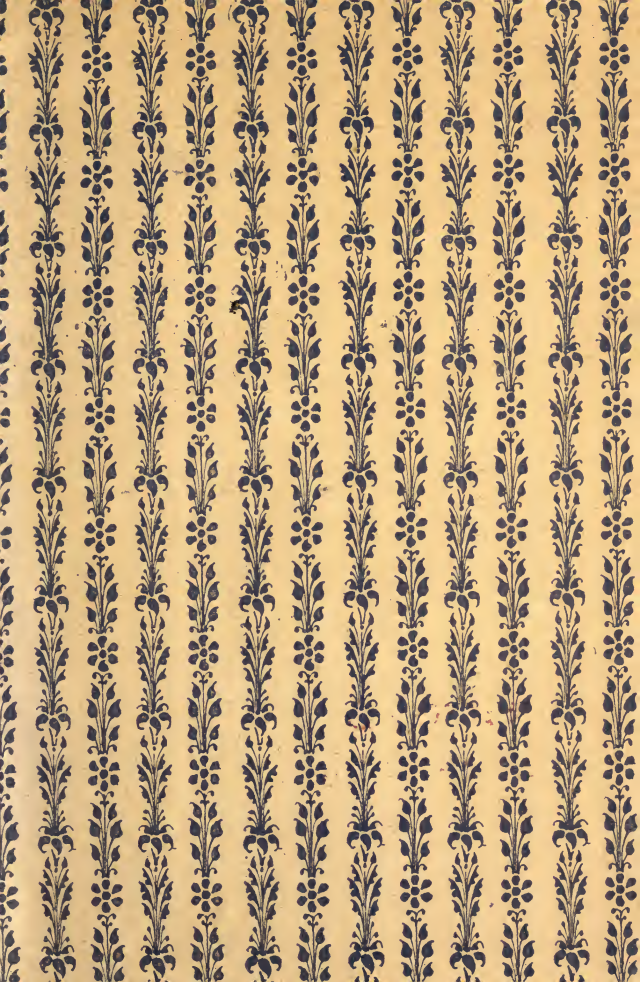
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